

Volunteering for impact



The Talent Foundry

About this report

In this report, we explore the far-reaching impact of employee volunteering on those we work with - young people, schools, employees and employers.

Using sector statistics, recognised frameworks and replicable activities we want to share our volunteer engagement experiences to help others maximise the impact of volunteering.

The economic business case for volunteering is huge - a contribution of £18 bn to the UK economy each year¹. Every day we see incredible benefits which transcend monetary value.

Our role in connecting businesses with the communities they serve and championing the value of employer engagement in education helps young people to think big about their futures.

Supporting volunteers to understand the barriers that young people face, allows us to create more meaningful opportunities to enhance work-readiness and access to opportunities.

At The Talent Foundry, we believe volunteering is not just an act of giving back, but a powerful tool for driving social mobility and unlocking potential on all sides.

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Executive summary

Talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not. The Talent Foundry (TTF), a UK education charity, bridges this gap and improves social mobility for young people in under-served communities.

Through inspiring, skills-based workshops, facilitated by TTF and supported by industry volunteers, we empower students to reach their potential.

We've been working in partnership with businesses for over 16 years, and a key component of our successful relationships and positive impact on young people is **the engagement and contribution of employees** in our programmes.

Last year **1,813 volunteers** supported young people in our programmes.

Volunteering can be altruistic and a powerful force with tangible benefits for individuals, organisations, and communities.

Everyone has their own motivations for giving their time and experience to support young people.

Some support our programmes because they did not have access to the type of opportunities we offer in schools. Others understand the value of young people being connected to the world of work through meaningful encounters before they leave school.



Whatever the entry route, there are clear benefits of volunteering:

For young people, exposure to volunteers can help shape aspirations, broaden career horizons and spark ambition.

For volunteers, the experience develops transferable skills, enhances leadership potential, and builds social capital - which can directly benefit their performance and job satisfaction.

For employers, fostering a culture of volunteering can enhance employee engagement, boost morale, and improve retention rates.

Employees who participate in volunteer programmes are more likely to stay with their employer long-term - 51% of employees felt more loyal after volunteering².

For teachers, corporate volunteers can enhance Careers Education, Information, Advice, and Guidance (CEIAG), helping to raise student aspirations, boost engagement and prepare them for life beyond the classroom.

These partnerships are vital for meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks³, particularly Benchmarks 5 and 6, by integrating real-world employer encounters and workplace experiences into lessons.

"It's opened my eyes to what students are experiencing.

As I progress in my career and move into a position where I have a say in hiring, I'll take what I've learned so that work environments can become more inclusive and representative of our country's socioeconomic structure."

Volunteer, Publicis Pro

Executive summary

Principles of volunteering for impact

Employee volunteering is an valuable experience that can generate positive change for young people, enrich schools careers provision, enhance employee satisfaction and strengthen businesses' social responsibility efforts.

By aligning employee volunteering with education frameworks like the Gatsby Benchmarks, businesses can have a transformational impact on young people's employability skills and work preparedness.



We have **five recommendations** from our experiences of working across education and industry on how to design a volunteer programme for impact.



Align volunteering with employee interests to boost engagement

Offer skill development and learning opportunities



Foster strong relationships with schools and communities

Provide structured opportunities



Celebrate, give recognition and feedback

Volunteering with The Talent Foundry

In 2023-2024, we supported 64,988 young people across 32 programmes, collaborating with 21 businesses and organisations and supporting schools in over 140 local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales.

We have two volunteer engagement objectives:

- **Volunteers have an increased understanding of the employment and other barriers that young people face today**
- **Volunteers feel rewarded and that their participation was valuable to their industry/sector or employer and community**



What volunteers say:

99% are proud their employer partners with The Talent Foundry

92% were interested in volunteering again

90% agreed the experience was valuable to their employer

84% agreed it gave them a greater understanding of barriers

"It was so fulfilling! To engage with young people who I personally identify with (in terms of my own upbringing) and saying 'you can achieve anything' was so rewarding."

Rise volunteer

"I have gained an increased understanding of the barriers that young people face when they look for job opportunities. I now feel better informed to advise them on how to improve their skills, despite the issues they may face."

M&G Skills for Life volunteer

"Participating in this project... enhances the company's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) profile, reflecting positively on the organisation's reputation... fosters stronger community ties and networking opportunities."

Rise volunteer

Volunteering benefits

Below, we outline the key benefits observed through our programmes and supported by broader research.

FOR EMPLOYEES

Purpose and skills development

"As a product of state education, I derive a profound sense of accomplishment and purpose from the opportunity to give back to pupils." **Rise volunteer**

Initiatives provide individuals with a sense of purpose while also fostering the development of critical professional skills, including communication, leadership, teamwork, and the ability to inspire and guide others.

Career advancement

Volunteering can contribute to career progression. Some employees report that volunteering supported their applications for more senior or varied positions within their organisations, and even helped them get a better job⁴.

"Taking part has helped me develop my confidence and leadership skills." **Bridge to M&G volunteer**

Strengthening connections and collaboration

Engagement cultivates a strong sense of community, enhances interpersonal relationships across departments and promotes more effective collaboration and networking. It can also improve work-life balance - an increasingly vital asset in hybrid and remote working environments.



FOR EMPLOYERS

Higher retention, stronger company culture and employee satisfaction

Organisations that actively support employee volunteering experience higher levels of employee loyalty, engagement, and overall job satisfaction.

Strengthened employer brand

A visible commitment to corporate social engagement significantly enhances an organisation's reputation, making it more attractive to emerging talent and future leaders.

"Sharing knowledge of our business and routes into employment could mean we get some students applying for roles with us - and we have the potential to gain some really talented employees."

Severn Trent FLOW volunteer

Advancement of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Volunteering initiatives enable organisations to tap into a broader range of employee skills, perspectives, and experiences, thereby enriching their approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Productivity and economic gains

Employees who volunteer often return with enhanced skills, renewed motivation, and increased productivity, contributing to substantial economic benefits - with an estimated £4.6 billion potential boost to the UK economy⁵.

Enhanced corporate reputation and stakeholder trust

Active involvement in community and social initiatives strengthens an organisation's corporate social responsibility profile, building greater trust among clients, partners, and the wider public.

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Exposure to real-world career experiences

Volunteers offer young people invaluable exposure to real-world career environments, helping them explore potential career paths and inspiring them to set higher aspirations. This firsthand experience bridges the gap between education and the professional world, fostering greater career awareness and ambition for the future talent.

Role models and career direction

The presence of volunteers as role models plays a pivotal role in shaping young people's career aspirations. In line with Gatsby Benchmark 5, students who engage with professionals report clearer career awareness and direction, providing them with the guidance and encouragement necessary to pursue their professional goals with confidence.

"I did indeed get that Cambridge offer! And honestly couldn't have done it without Inspire US. A few months ago I wasn't even considering applying but when I say the programme was life-changing I mean it!" **Inspire US student**

Importance of locality, accent and background

We place great importance on involving volunteers who are local. For example, in our M&G Skills for Life - Middlesbrough and Rochdale programmes, volunteers from SMEs from the same locality as the students has a transformational effect.

"The volunteers were quite nice to hear from... some of the things they overcame and where they came from... you think you can do anything if they can."

Student, Skills for Life

When students meet role models who grew up nearby, share their accent, or come from similar backgrounds, it helps bridge the gap between aspiration and reality. Seeing professionals from some of the largest firms in the world who reflect their own community makes success feel attainable.

FOR EDUCATORS

Access to industries expertise

Corporate volunteers provide teachers with current insights into a wide range of industries, enabling them to deliver more relevant and practical CEIAG aligned with the evolving job market.

- **95%** of educators agreed that participation in The Talent Foundry programmes added value to their CEIAG provision
- **86%** reported feeling better equipped to connect students with employers or higher education opportunities.

The enrichment of workshops through volunteer support also aligns with the Gatsby Benchmarks ensuring that students gain exposure to real-world experiences and industry knowledge.

Addressing gaps in careers provision

Corporate volunteers provide students with practical activities, exposure to new industries and the development of work ready skills.

Programmes delivered by charities and business partners, such as those provided through Talent Foundry, are typically fully funded and externally managed. This reduces the administrative burden on teachers and improving resource and time efficiency - allowing them to focus on delivering high-quality teaching.

Plus, employer-supported programmes can be designed to integrate with the curriculum.

The **Gatsby Benchmarks** provide a clear framework to ensure all young people have access to high-quality careers education. For schools, they offer a practical way to connect students with employers and prepare them for work.

Benchmarks 5 and 6 focused on employer encounters and workplace experiences are especially well supported through volunteering, helping schools meet their statutory duties while enriching student learning.

Volunteering insights from our programmes



An educators perspective

"Having industry volunteers in the room made career paths real for students - it wasn't just theory anymore."

Transforming aspirations at Thomas Knyvett College, Spelthorne.

When we brought The Big Idea and Rise workshops into our college, I could see straight away that this was something different, explains Judah, Raising Aspirations Coordinator.

I watched students start to engage in a way they hadn't before.

They were more curious, more motivated, and they began asking better questions. You could see their thinking shift. They started to imagine real futures for themselves, ones they hadn't considered or thought possible.

What really struck me was **the change in confidence**. Some of our quieter students came out of their shells. They started leading group discussions, mentoring others, and putting themselves forward. All because they'd had that connection with someone from industry who made them feel seen and capable.

I also noticed how their behaviour changed. They were more organised, more focused, and worked better in teams. Students continued to set clearer goals and take more ownership of their learning long after the workshops were over.

As staff, we benefitted too. **The volunteers shared current, real-world insights** that helped us better understand what today's industries are looking for.

It gave us more confidence when guiding students, and helped us make careers education more relevant.

There was also a real sense of community that came out of the experience. Students from different year groups worked together, and there was a level of inclusion and collaboration that we don't always see day to day. **That atmosphere lasted well beyond the sessions themselves.**

Looking back, these workshops didn't just raise aspirations, they helped students see what they were truly capable of, and gave us, as educators, new tools to support them on that journey.



"Participating offered several personal benefits. It enhanced my communication skills by requiring me to explain work-related concepts clearly to Year 10 students... It also provided valuable leadership and mentoring experience... Addressing student questions improved my adaptability and problem-solving."

Rise volunteer

The power of collaboration

“Some of the students made a real connection with the volunteers; opening students' eyes to new possibilities - one of them said she was inspired to pursue a position of leadership as a result of taking part.”

ICAEW, BDO, EY, Grant Thornton, KPMG, and PwC, in partnership with The Talent Foundry, founded **Rise** in 2021 to support young people in under-served communities develop the skills they need to succeed in life and work.

Now with 40+ employer partners, Rise supports students aged 11-16 in areas where opportunities are limited, with a particular focus on coastal and rural communities.

The workshops, facilitated by TTF, support volunteers to share their career journeys, expertise and insight with students. They bring an up-to-date perspective on what the world of work is like and young people gain valuable knowledge about the skills they need for their next steps.

Through this unique collaboration, Rise not only helps young people build essential skills, but also strengthens ties between businesses and communities. It enhances volunteer confidence, professional development, and sector pride.

With a strong focus on collaboration, measurable impact, and long-term social change, Rise is a leading example of how volunteering and cross-sector partnerships can drive educational equity and social mobility across the UK.



“This was a fun new experience for me as I haven't done it before! I enjoyed my experience helping the children and getting to know some of the other staff helping out. It has benefited me personally as it has helped me build confidence in more of a senior role and helping others with work.

It gave me a better insight to more barriers that people face and helps me understand that everybody comes from different backgrounds.”

Rise volunteer

“It helped me think more about what job I want to do when I am older and what I enjoy.”

“I learnt about transferable skills needed in a business and how to effectively work in a team.”

“This workshop has given me insight into interviews, what employers would require of you as an interviewee and how you can stand out from others.”

“Having advice from industry volunteers will benefit me in the future as it alleviates some stress on knowing what to do.”

Student feedback, Rise

Volunteer perspective

“The experience was not only valuable for the students, but also for myself, as it touched on a topic that helped shape some of my career choices.”

Adrian is a volunteer on the Maven Secure Your Potential programme.

I've volunteered on the Secure Your Potential programme for the past two years, supporting The Talent Foundry workshops at Maven's offices.

The programme works with students from some of the most under-served schools in London - young people who often haven't had many opportunities to explore professional careers or build confidence in a business environment.

Just being in our offices and meeting professionals can make a big impact, it opens their eyes to possibilities they might not have considered.

It was rewarding to listen to their aspirations, answer their questions, and hopefully give them some helpful advice.

One workshop I took part in focused on values and that really resonated with me. It's a topic I first came across when I was applying for jobs as a student, and it's something that's helped shape some of my career choices. Having the chance to reflect on those values again was refreshing.

Volunteering also gave me a chance to strengthen my communication and listening skills. The age gap between me and the students isn't massive, but I still had to think carefully about how to explain things clearly and meet them where they're at.

I believe this kind of volunteering benefits Maven too.

Inviting students into our offices shows them what a career in this field could look like. It can really motivate them. And for us as employees, it's a chance to practise giving feedback, reflect on our own values, and build skills that are useful in our day-to-day work.

Overall, it's been an excellent experience. I'd absolutely encourage others to get involved, not just for the impact you can have, but for the insight and development you get in return.

"It was so helpful and really pushed me to solidify my career choice. I'm not so stressed about what I want to do now.

I learned what my core values are, and what strengths I possess."

Student

"Absolutely great programme in raising aspirations and growing them in team building and presentation skills.

Great insight into the world of corporate work environment."

Teacher

Designing a volunteer programme for impact





Align volunteering with employee interests to boost engagement

Why it's important

- Employees who volunteer for causes they care about are more motivated, committed, and enthusiastic.
- Increased engagement translates into stronger loyalty, productivity, and advocacy at work.

"We get involved because we are looking for a range of skills in the next generation. It's important to consider good communication skills, listening skills, and to be confident in what they want, and to know how to get it. Connecting with volunteers from different industries can show them what's out there and allow them to learn from our career experiences."

Skills for Life Middlesbrough volunteer

How we do it

Flexible volunteering connects employees to causes such as social mobility and youth development.

Volunteers can engage in flexible, interest-led activities tailored to their availability. Involvement can range from single-session to multi-session support - delivered in schools or workplaces. Opportunities include supporting students in activities led by our professional facilitators, mentoring in intensive intervention programmes, CV reviews, and delivering talks or sharing career insights.



Offer skill development and learning opportunities

Why it's important

- Employees can grow personally and professionally through volunteering.

"There is a lot that I have learned personally through young people and their perception of the working experience."

Barclays LifeSkills Ambition Unlocked volunteer

How we do it

We offer a range of volunteer opportunities that allow employees to develop new skills and gain experience outside their regular job responsibilities. These programmes help enhance soft skills such as communication, leadership, and problem-solving, while working with young people.

By providing various levels of involvement and commitment, we ensure that volunteers and students benefit from a mutually enriching experience.

"Rewarding to see the students progress during the day and build their skills. It also helps me personally as I get to interact with a group of students and increase my skills in that area as it's nothing like I encounter on my day to day job."

Dell Powering Transformation volunteer

"Volunteering in Blackpool was a genuinely enriching experience, personally and professionally. Supporting young people, many of whom are facing difficult circumstances, gave me a valuable perspective on the challenges others face and the importance of providing meaningful opportunities and encouragement."

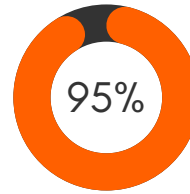
Skills for Life Blackpool volunteer



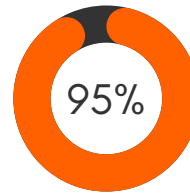
Foster strong relationships with schools and communities

Why it's important

- Companies that build long-term, genuine partnerships with education charities see greater brand trust and measurable social value outcomes.
- Supports new talent pipeline and workplace diversity



of volunteers felt that skills the young people developed are relevant in their industry



of teachers reported added value to their CEIAG provision

How we do it

We have a network of over 2,000 schools, delivering industry-backed initiatives that support students' career development and aspirations. This has helped us to connect national and local, SME businesses to talent on their doorstep.

By fostering long-term relationships with schools and local communities, we ensure that volunteer efforts contribute to a lasting impact on young people's educational journeys. For employers, this collaborative approach helps highlight the vast amount of talent and ambition in their local communities, and raises awareness of their industry and career pathways to a new generation.

"The Dell Powering Potential programme gave our students opportunities that they wouldn't otherwise have had the chance to experience. It gave the students the opportunity to speak directly with employers, and make valuable contacts. Following the sessions, one student in particular has a new career goal and has been actively researching how to achieve that."

Teacher, Hartlepool Sixth Form

"Young people who attended this work shop have developed in confidence and some have now decided on careers in the NHS."

Teacher, Hadley Learning Community

"The Talent Foundry have provided opportunities for our young people to pursue a pathway of interest. They work with organisations of significance to support the development of knowledge and soft skills required in the work industry."

Teacher, London Nautical School

"We have an ageing employee population at East Midlands Railway, and as an industry in full. It is really great to provide some inspiration for young people as they make early career decisions. It was great to be able to provide something so in-depth to a school I regularly volunteer with. The facilitators and management team were all a joy to work alongside."

RSSB Track to the Future programme member

"I highly recommend The Talent Foundry for its exceptional dedication to providing students with incredible career opportunities and broadening their horizons. Through innovative programmes and partnerships, they equip young people with valuable skills, real-world experiences, and insights into various industries. This not only enhances their career prospects but also inspires them to reach their full potential."

Teacher, Oaks Park High School



Provide structured volunteer opportunities

Why it's important

- Structured opportunities reduce stress, maximise satisfaction, and deliver visible impact for employees and their communities
- Employees thrive when experiences are well-organised with clear goals.

How we do it

Each programme, whether it's a one-day workshop or a multi-part initiative, has clear objectives, goals, and defined roles for volunteers. This structure ensures that volunteers understand their responsibilities, safeguarding considerations and can contribute confidently with students they have not met before. A key factor in the preparation is our comprehensive briefing packs and calls so volunteers have all the information they need.

"Everything was great. I particularly liked that everything was organised for us and we just had to be us on the day with minimum prep on our side. Facilitator and made us feel very comfortable."

Network Rail Lightbulb Moments volunteer

"I thoroughly enjoyed volunteering for this, so much so, I can't wait to do the next one. It was well organised."

NHS Next Gen volunteer

"The energy that TTF create in the room each session makes you want to come back next time and you are excited to see how the students have grown week on week."

Skills for Life Rochdale volunteer



Celebrate, give recognition and feedback

Why it's important

- Feedback from beneficiaries, such as students or schools, demonstrates the direct impact of volunteering, enhancing their experience and encouraging continued participation.

"I'm immensely proud of the project and grateful to my employer for supporting me to attend. Volunteering has left me feeling, proud, more energised, and hopeful for the future."

Skills for Life Middlesbrough volunteer

"The project is a feel-good, fulfilling project to be a part of and you really do feel like you are making a difference to the young people - even in a really small way."

Skills for Life Rochdale volunteer

How we do it

We are committed to making every volunteer feel appreciated and valued. We know that recognising contributions and acting on feedback is essential to building long-term, rewarding partnerships with our corporate supporters as well as with our schools. We do this through formal and informal channels, reviewing where we can make improvements based on the feedback shared.

Get involved

Our programmes, delivered in partnership with leading employers, are open doors for young people who are often furthest from opportunity. Many of the students we work with come from the most under-served schools in the country - places where access to professional networks, career insights, or even just a conversation with someone in a relevant industry is limited or non-existent.

That's where volunteers come in. They are the heartbeat of our programmes. By sharing their experiences, asking thoughtful questions and listening - they help students connect what they're learning in school with where it could take them.

For many young people, a single meaningful conversation with someone in the workplace can become a turning point.

This report has focused on the importance of employee engagement within our programme delivery. Many of our supporters also volunteer by fundraising for us or giving their expertise to support our growth - thank you!

If you would like to speak to The Talent Foundry about developing a schools programme, or other ways to support our work, please contact:

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Our volunteers

Thank you to everyone who has volunteered on a TTF programme from our partners:

A&O Shearman
ABM UK
Barclays LifeSkills
Dell Technologies
Hook
ICAEW and Rise partner firms
KPMG
Logicor
M&G plc
Mace Group
Maven Securities
The NHS
Network Rail
Pearson
Publicis Pro
Rail Standards and Safety Board (RSSB)
Rice Search Partners
SAS UK
Severn Trent
Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA)
University of Bedfordshire
University of Manchester
University of Warwick

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The 100+ volunteers who support our intensive connections and Bridge programmes:

- Odgers Berndtson
- Inspire US volunteers

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All quantitative data presented in this report was collected by The Talent Foundry during the 2023–24 academic year. Qualitative data was drawn from programme delivery and stakeholder feedback across the 2023–24 and 2024–25 academic years.

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